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A TRIBUTE TO DR. BRIGGS

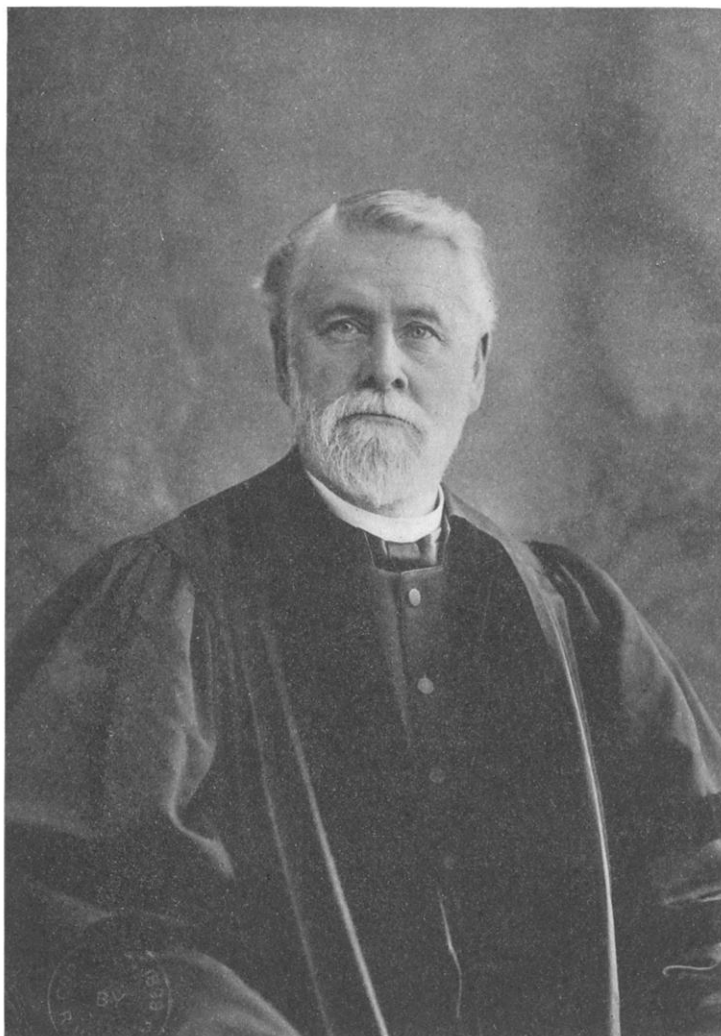
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The publication of a volume of essays in honor of Professor Briggs is an event that deserves special attention.¹

The volume is not one that can be "reviewed" in the ordinary sense of that word, seeing that it contains twenty-four different contributions on a great variety of subjects—philological, exegetical, archaeological, historical, theological, and philosophical; brief reference may be made to some of its articles, and a few words set down as to the occasion that has called it forth. The following statement from the preface brings the subject clearly before us: "This volume is offered to Professor Charles Augustus Briggs by a little group of his pupils and colleagues, with the addition of only two or three close friends. It is a testimonial of their personal affection, as well as of their sense of obligation to the veteran scholar and teacher, and they have chosen as its occasion his completion of seventy years of life, not because they do not hope for him many years of fruitful work, but because this anniversary recalls to them his long and notable service, and reminds them afresh of all they owe to the stimulus of his untiring energy, his patient research, his fearlessness in proclaiming truth, his warm personal sympathy, and his quick response to every demand upon his stores of knowledge and the treasures—often unsuspected—of his warm and valiant heart. They are glad that he should have now, while his vigor is yet unabated, this attestation of their regard."

One must admit that the principle of expressing to a gifted and faithful public servant the appreciation and gratitude of those whom he has stimulated and helped is a rational one; and also the form that it takes in such a volume as this is exceedingly appropriate. What can be more acceptable to the teacher than to see that his life-work has borne rich fruit in the vigorous service that his former students are now rendering to the cause of biblical scholarship? Of the twenty-four

¹ *Essays in Modern Theology and Related Subjects*. Gathered and Published as a Testimonial to Charles Augustus Briggs, D.D., D.Litt., on the Completion of His Seventieth Year by a Few of his Pupils, Colleagues, and Friends. New York: Scribner, 1911. xvi+347 pages. \$2.50.



PROFESSOR CHARLES AUGUSTUS BRIGGS, D.D., D.LITT.

contributors nineteen are alumni of Union Theological Seminary, and of these contributors quite a number are now in academic positions. These men, of course, owe their education and their character to a great variety of forces, but they all testify that Dr. Briggs exerted a powerful and healthful influence upon them at the most important period of their lives, and this is surely a noble testimony in which their teacher is justified in finding a real satisfaction. He has evidently been the means of stimulating many of them to carry on the same kind of work as that in which he was himself engaged, and in the same spirit.

In looking over the volume one soon gains the impression that it is a worthy tribute to a successful teacher and a credit to American scholarship. The range of subjects is wide, and this springs from deliberate choice in order to embody the idea that the man to whom the volume is dedicated is no narrow specialist but a man of wide reading and varied theological and practical interests. Where there is so much that is good it is difficult to make a selection, but a bare list of contents would not be very illuminating and a full review is out of the question. One general remark may be made before attempting any particular notices, viz., that the subjects chosen are of living interest; of course the philosophic questions here treated are always alive if they are handled with any measure of vigor and insight, but the special subjects, such as "Polytheism in Genesis," by Professor C. H. Toy; "The Return of the Jews under Cyrus," by Professor Edward Lewis Curtis; "The Sons of Korah," by Rev. Dr. J. P. Peters, and others of a somewhat similar character have a real bearing on disputed points of Old Testament criticism; Professor J. A. Bewer, who contributes "Exegetical Notes on Jeremiah," has made a wise selection of difficult passages and proposes some new solutions which, whether accepted or not, are worthy of careful consideration. The same is true of the New Testament subjects given by Dr. G. H. Gilbert and Professor Marvin R. Vincent.

Professor Francis Brown contributes a vigorous article on "The Decline of Prophecy" in which, by the way, he criticizes Duhm's endeavor to make certain passages late by means of very precarious linguistic arguments. In this connection he says: "Every Old Testament scholar must recognize his enormous debt to Duhm, whose independence and vigor have done so much to revitalize Old Testament exegesis and criticism, but his opinions on the points under discussion are certainly misleading." Many will sympathize with both sides of this statement, and we are glad to meet this vigorous defense of Jeremiah's "New Covenant." The article mentions the various influences which

avored the decline of prophecy. The opening paragraph will show that the subject is not treated in any pedantic fashion: "The prophetic writings of the Old Testament mark one of the great religious movements of the human race—probably the most significant of all, with one single exception. They also present a literary phenomenon which it is by no means easy to explain or understand. The rise and decline of any literature we can observe, as a matter of history, but we are seldom able to account for it any more than we should be to predict it. Antecedents and concomitants show themselves; sometimes they look like causes, sometimes like occasions, sometimes like secondary influences. Who shall analyze a literary situation—especially one of the rare creative periods—and tabulate its forces? Genius refuses to be analyzed. The essences whose combination gives the delicate flavor of a masterpiece, the insight and unconstrained ardor that command the spirit, cannot be followed back to the lurking places they emerge from, nor is the formula of combination to be set down by chemical symbols. And if we cannot tell how genius awakes, neither can we give adequate reasons for its decline into slumber. We can do hardly more than gather more phenomena and establish a series, which, in a given case, attends the process at one end or the other, offering hypotheses, if we like, as to possible effects produced by what seem to have the efficiency of causes. When the literature is religious literature, and its substance is the life of the soul in its highest relations, we are least of all in a position to deal with its phases by scientific process, for there is always mystery in religion." Certainly there is mystery in all things, not only in religion, but that does not absolve us from the duty of seeking to understand as far as possible these subtle processes. Professor Brown seeks all possible light on the subject and calls our attention to many important features of the later history of Hebrew prophecy.

Another debated point in Old Testament history is discussed by Professor Curtis: "The Return of the Jews under Cyrus." A brief but careful review is given of a subject upon which there has been much controversy since Kosters "cast upon the event the first doubts of an impressive character," in 1894. The net result is to show the weakness of the documentary evidence, and yet, as many Old Testament students have felt, this does not absolutely settle the matter.

"Yet in spite of all these facts certain things suggest the reality of a return. The preservation of prophecies mentioned concerning Cyrus suggests that they had been fulfilled in some such way. The poverty-stricken remnant left in the land would seem to require an impulse from

without for the revival of interest in the Temple culminating in the movement inaugurated by Haggai and Zechariah. The return need not have been mentioned in the short discourses of these prophets. The spirituality of their appeal may have caused silence in reference to royal patronage and hostile efforts. What also was more inevitable than a return if, according to the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the choicest portion of Israel was in captivity? Could the men whose passion for Jerusalem was that of Ps. 137 have been restrained from returning to Jerusalem? Cyrus, from all that is known of Persian policy, would not only have permitted but probably have favored a return. Thus it is not impossible that there was some sort of a return of the Jews under Cyrus, but the evidence for it is very slight, and we have no reason to believe that the Chronicler's account is anything else than imaginary."

An exceedingly interesting and useful statement concerning "The Repression of Scientific Inquiry in the Ancient Church" is given by Rev. Professor John Winthrop Platner, D.D. Considering the nature of the subject, it is brief but very much to the point. "The fundamental difference between pagan and Christian was this, that while Greek philosophic speculation and discovery were free, Christian thinking along similar lines was from comparatively early times increasingly bound. Limits were established beyond which it might not pass. Catholicism—that potent excluding and unifying force, which for at least twelve centuries controlled the church—created these limits, and by the exercise of ecclesiastical authority compelled Christian thought to move safely within them. The same influence which operated to unify organization, worship, and creed operated also to suppress divergence of opinion concerning matters not properly connected with religion at all, or even—as we have at last come to see—with theology either." This statement is illustrated by the contents of the essay and, as it seems to us, fully justified. But the writer does not in any crude fashion attempt to judge the ancient theologians by the standards of a later time. "After all is said, one shall remember that it was in this same intolerant church that the learning of antiquity, as well as of the Middle Ages, was preserved, and at her bosom were nourished children who should in time break down false barriers and once more make both religion and science free." One would gladly pay some attention to the articles on "The Christian Demand for Unity," by Professor W. Adams Brown, and "A Definition of Mysticism," by Professor T. C. Hall, but space forbids; sufficient has been said to show that the contents

of the volume are rich and varied and form a worthy tribute to the distinguished scholar in whose honor they have been written and published.

At the close of the present volume there is given a bibliography of almost twenty pages, which does not profess to be complete, but which shows at a glance not only that Dr. Briggs has been a prolific writer capable of severe and continuous work of a high order, but also that his interest has not been confined to one small corner of the historical and theological field. While giving special attention to biblical criticism and Old Testament exegesis Professor Briggs has manifested a deep interest in the intellectual and spiritual life of the whole church. Having reached three score years and ten he can look back upon a life of fruitful toil and rejoice that he has played an important part in the critical movement that has been for good or ill such a striking feature of the life of the Christian church, on its intellectual side, during the last generation. If the present writer were competent for the task, which he cannot claim to be, it would not be possible for him now to attempt an appreciation and criticism of Dr. Briggs's contributions to theology and biblical exegesis. It is appropriate, however, that in the *Biblical World*, someone representing the outsiders, so to speak, that is, those who know him only from his books, should join with his former students and personal friends in an expression of thankfulness for the good work that he has done, and in the hope that he may still have many days of peaceful and satisfactory service. Rest may he have, when it is needed, but we know that such a man has ever found the highest joy in strenuous work. We are not now concerned to examine such special points as to how far he was a pioneer in investigations concerning Hebrew meter or how his writings of years ago on "Messianic prophecy" stand in the light of present criticism. We have to content ourselves with the general statement that he has been both critical and conservative, and so in a period of transition has rendered immense service to his church and country. He rendered service to the cause of freedom and to the church that cast him out. The present writer is a loyal member of the Presbyterian church, and to him as to many others it was a matter of pain and regret when Dr. Briggs was condemned by the American branch of that church. That impression has only deepened as the years have gone by. As one living in another country, I cannot speak from personal knowledge, but on general principles one would think that the action of the General Assembly did more harm to the church that it represented than it can possibly have done to Dr. Briggs.

How important it is that in dealing with such difficult and delicate matters a church should be led by wise men who refuse to be ruled by narrow prejudice and fierce bigotry!

The writer of this review owes that which comes nearest to a personal impression of Dr. Briggs to a small book published in 1893 and entitled *The Trial of Dr. Briggs before the General Assembly. A Calm Review of the Case by a Stranger Who Attended All the Sessions of the Court*. This book, giving at the time only the initials of the writer's name, came, as is now well known, from the pen of the late Dr. Laidlaw, a distinguished minister of the Presbyterian church in Canada. Here we have the report of an intelligent witness, who was at the beginning in no sense a partisan of Dr. Briggs, and who speaks of a General Assembly in terms of reverence, almost in terms that a devout Roman Catholic might use concerning a council of his church. "He believes that the circumstances surrounding the trial of Dr. Briggs were of such a nature that error on the part of the court was unavoidable, and that it is therefore no reflection on the court to point out wherein it may be shown to have erred. In doing this he has sought to avoid any word that might be regarded as disrespectful to the Assembly as a whole or to any of its members." He gives his own "attitude," that of Dr. Briggs, and of the Assembly. He was a Presbyterian minister who had in his earliest years been taught the "Shorter Catechism" and as a theological student had been trained at the seat of purest orthodoxy—Princeton Seminary. "As already intimated, I had formed no definite opinion as to the merits of the Briggs case, and had taken no side on the questions at issue, though my reading on the subject had tended to incline me toward an unfavorable judgment of Dr. Briggs's views." The chapter on the attitude of the Assembly shows clearly that such a great public convention is quite unfit to be a "court" on such a delicate and complicated question. "No wonder that at one stage of the proceedings, when Dr. Briggs was presenting some of his most important evidence, a commissioner should have moved that the Assembly take an extended recess, as about half a dozen commissioners near him were fast asleep." The impression forced upon this disinterested observer was that the majority of the members of the Assembly had come there to register a foregone conclusion. The impression was widespread that Dr. Briggs entertained and taught heretical views, and that whatever might be said, it was the duty of representatives of the church to condemn such views. It may not be out of place here to quote the statement of Rev. Dr. Duffield of Princeton, "one of the most venerable of his opponents": "Dr. Briggs

undoubtedly is a man of rare scholarship, a man who has received honors from European universities, and who deserves the respect and the kind treatment of his Christian brethren. And, if Dr. Briggs will pardon me for saying it, if Dr. Briggs's logical faculty were equal to his scholarship, I know not his peer in the intellectual world, certainly of America." To this our reporter adds his pertinent comment: "To a stranger the value of this high tribute was enhanced by the fact that it was exceedingly difficult to detect any flaw in his logic. He seemed almost too good a logician. He relied too much upon logical syllogisms, and made use of them in some instances, in his defense before the Assembly, when a less strictly intellectual process might have served his purpose better. I would say that he sometimes appeared to forget that 'those root truths upon which the foundation of being rest are apprehended, not logically, but mystically'; but I am forbidden by the recollection that some of his opponents accused him of mysticism. . . . He did not parade his piety, it is true, yet it was apparent to all who saw and heard him for the first time that he was what his friends and opponents alike declared him to be, not only a great scholar but a good man. After carefully observing his attitude of mind and listening attentively to all his utterances in his defense, I was not surprised when told privately that in matters of morals 'he is a Puritan of the Puritans.'" Certainly a man who could go through such an ordeal without being crushed or soured possessed strength of character and many noble qualities of mind and heart. This may be regarded by some as ancient history, that only needs to be forgotten, but like all real history, there is a living lesson at the heart of it, and we can only hope that the church will learn the lesson and show a keener sympathy for men who are struggling for larger views of truth. In conclusion we wish for Dr. Briggs many years of restful service in the eventide of his life.